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ABSTRACT

Nine San Francisco (California) second-year teachers who had conducted structured weekly meetings during their preservice program continue to meet monthly with two Stanford University researchers. At these meetings they discuss emerging values, philosophies, and pedagogical practice. The meetings involve formal check-in times for individuals to report on their lives, followed by a charrette (a protocol borrowed from architecture involving presentation of a project to a critical cohort). As members introduce a charrette, they provide the context of their school and classroom and articulate the kind of feedback they would like. The experience offers the teachers a chance to deliberate in a caring environment and make sense of difficult situations. Three events illustrate the promise and tensions of critical friendship. In this study many instances of resistance and tension can be documented. Teachers had differing opinions of how critical friends should be and how friendly critics should be. Problems arose when teachers limited themselves to safe feedback or resisted hearing criticism. However, teachers had strong emotional support within the group and could expose and explore vulnerabilities among friends. It must be recognized that such a group outside a school or university setting may be unstable over time. (Contains 36 references). (SM)

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THE UNEASY MARRIAGE BETWEEN FRIENDSHIP AND CRITIQUE: DILEMMAS OF FOSTERING CRITICAL FRIENDSHIP IN A NOVICE TEACHER LEARNING COMMUNITY

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Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association
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An Uneasy Marriage: An Introduction

This paper explores the dilemmas that arise from fostering "critical friendship" in a novice teacher learning community. Educational theorists call for fostering teacher learning communities (Barber, 1992; Barth, 1990; Dewey, 1916; Little & McLaughlin, 1993; McLaughlin & Talbert 1993; Rosenholtz, 1989). The "community" component of a "teacher learning community" emphasizes shared values, interconnectedness and an ethic of care among teachers (Meier, 1995; Noddings, 1992; Sergiovanni, 1994). Such communities may be particularly important for novice teachers who experience alienation, lack of support, and conflicting educational norms as they transition from teacher education to school sites (Huling-Austin, 1986; Dworkin, 1987; Bennett and LeCompte, 1990). The "learning" component of a "teacher learning community" identifies its inquiry stance that engages teachers in critical reflection. Such reflection challenges implicit assumptions of teaching and schooling practices for the purposes of changing conditions (Dewey, 1916; Gardner, 1991; Newmann, 1994; Westheimer, 1995).

These two components, one of friendly support and the other of critical reflection are combined in the practice of "critical friendship" within a teacher learning community. A critical friend is a trusted person who offers critique of anothers' work. The friendship comes from a stance as an advocate for the success of the work; the critique from the deep questioning. When practiced in a group setting, critical friendship communities purport to offer multiple perspectives (Maher, 1991), where individuals challenge each other in a climate of mutual vulnerability and risktaking. Studies have shown that teacher learning communities engaging in critically friendly behavior influence professional development that may support transformation of practices in schooling (Lieberman & Miller 1984; Little 1990; McLaughlin and Talbert, 1993). **Yet a dilemma is posed by merging norms of friendship with those of critique. How friendly can critics be and how critical can friends be?** There are institutional pressures that separate and form a hierarchy in the relationship between friendship and critique that result in significant practical tensions. These tensions are left unexplored by previous research and leave teachers ill-prepared for the challenges of critical friendship.

This paper will examine the uneasy marriage between friendship and critique in the context of a novice teacher learning community which reflects a three-year, voluntary collaboration among nine teachers and two university researchers at Stanford University. In 1995, the participants were students in Stanford's Teacher Education Program (STEP); in 1997 they are nine second-year teachers working at nine different San Francisco, bay area school sites. The group convened weekly in their pre-service program and monthly during their first and second years of teaching. The group convenes to deliberate about emerging values, philosophies and pedagogical practice. In addition they discuss and collaborate on the development of curricular experiments drawing from the principles of Ann Brown and Joseph Campione's "Fostering Communities of Learners"(in this paper referred to COL).[1] The purpose of this paper is to understand more about the complexity of fostering critical friendship by uncovering some of the tensions experienced by one novice teacher learning community. This work informs professional development researchers as well as practitioners engaged in understanding collaborative and critically reflective initiatives aimed at improving teacher practices and schooling.

Theoretical Frame

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1 See Brown, A.L. and Campione, J.C. (in press) "Psychological Theory and the Design of Innovative Learning Environments: On Procedures, Principles and Systems. To appear in R. Schauble and R R. Glaser (eds) Contributions of Instructional Innovation to Understanding Learning. Hillsdale: Erlbaum Press.

The theoretical underpinning for this paper has to do with the paradoxical relationship between critics and friends, professional development and professional support. We draw from two professional development literatures, the literature of teacher community (Little and McLaughlin, 1993; McLaughlin and Talbert, 1993; Lieberman and Miller, 1990), and critical reflection (Louden, 1992; Schon, 1983; Shor and Freire, 1987). While some who research teacher communities identify shared norms and values that support innovation and classroom experimentation (Little and McLaughlin, 1993), others see such collaboration as a site of support and reassurance from peers (Johnson, 1990; Rosenholtz, 1989). This latter group emphasizes caring relationships and sometimes de-emphasize teaching content or professional practice (Sergiovanni, 1994). Some advocates draw on the "community" literature nostalgic for stronger personal ties and a sense of connectedness (See Bellah et. al., 1985; Sergiovanni, 1994). Alternatively, the literature of critical reflection, emphasizes the professional nature of teacher interactions, the role of questioning and challenging others' underlying assumptions in order to transform practice. This literature, oftentimes ignores and subordinates the realm of personal support.

Some of the literature on teacher communities in schools emphasizes emotional support and fostering shared visions, sometimes placing critique and "professional" concerns secondary to friendship. Noddings idealizes a caring community where "Teachers will have to build time to talk to each other about their own growth as well as that of students. They will have to offer each other moral support, intellectual/academic help, and solid friendship" (Noddings, 1992, p. 177). Such communities purport to decrease teacher isolation through fostering collegiality and a shared vision among peers. Collaboration in communities is seen as a site of support and reassurance from peers, and a way to ease the kinds of teacher uncertainty inherent in the profession (Lortie, 1975; Johnson, 1990; Rosenholtz, 1989; Cohen, 1990). From this perspective, teacher isolation must be countered by community building. Johnson explains, "Teachers look to colleagues to meet their personal needs for social interaction, reassurance, and psychological support." (Johnson 1990, p.156).

Alternatively, the literature on critical reflection, places a critical stance above friendship. Critical reflection combines reflective practices (Schon, 1983) and critical education theory (Freire 1983; Shor and Freire, 1987) and involves teacher in thinking, criticizing and transforming the current conditions of work and schooling; it is a process of questioning "taken-for-granteds" (Louden, 1992) in order to change practices and conditions (Kemmis, 1985 cited in Zeichner and Tabachnich, 1991). Critical reflection may be done individually or in groups, the latter communal activity is important in engaging a dialogue containing a multiplicity of perspective and alternatives.

Critical reflection may call into question those principles valued by caring communities - a common or shared vision. Uncovering a lack of consensus and disclosing alternative beliefs may be at odds with norms of communities. The norm of critique may bring teachers in opposition with their colleagues. Critical reflection forces teachers to confront each other as they wrestle with "the social and political contexts of schooling and the assessment of classroom actions for their ability to contribute toward greater equity, social justice and human conditions in schooling and society." (Zeichner and Tabachnich, 1991, p.3).

These theoretical perspectives are combined into a framework called "critical friendship." The practice engages individuals or groups in critical reflection in the climate of friendship. Critical friendship practices include when "a trusted person asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critique of a person's work as a friend." (Costa and Kallick, 1993) Reform initiatives such as the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative are engaging school people in acts of critical friendship. They describe the reciprocal relationship of school partners engaged in critical friendship as offering,

> outside perspectives to help remind them of their goal, to provide support when the going gets tough, to ask hard questions, to point out 'blind spots' or biases, and to listen.(BASRC, 1996)

Such critical reflection within a supportive community may prove to be important in the professional development of new teachers. Not only for the more commonly understood development of practice, but more importantly in a teacher's development as a professional. In the case of novice teachers development as a professional encompasses a process of coming to know oneself (including beliefs about pedagogy and discipline, and one's vision of self as teacher and colleague); it also involves coming to understand the school and institutional contexts in which one navigates. Critical reflection allows one to understand actions in relation to beliefs and ultimately to transform these actions in order to align them with beliefs.

In this sense, the critical friendship cohort may act as a mediating site for the individual teachers to make sense of themselves and schooling in the process of becoming a professional. The caring deliberation that occurs within a critical friendship community may support teachers identifying discrepancies between beliefs and practice. This sensemaking function may prove crucial in enabling a new teacher to remain in the profession and to successfully navigate in an educational environment. The sensemaking function is also necessary for the transformational aspect of critique to take place. It may also counter the appropriating of conservative or mediocre routines of their school context (Feiman-Nemser and Floden, 1986) as the critical friendship practices surface implicit institutional presses that affect who the teacher wants to be. Alternatively, participation may have the impact of isolating the teacher or creating an oppositional stance with her home school. This is accentuated by the outsider status of a cohort of critical friends who form a network beyond the school level.

Our data and the literature indicate many examples of promising professional collaborations which potentially effect professional development. However, to carefully structure and foster communities of teachers that discuss the personal and the professional, will not necessarily lead to critical friendships. **There are institutional barriers and serious dilemmas raised by the merger of critique and friendship, thus making it an "uneasy marriage."** Institutionalized myths about teacher interactions separates "work" and "play," or professional development and professional "support." These institutional pressures include norms of privacy, autonomy, egalitarianism, and beliefs that interpret "help seeking" as a sign of weakness, which in turn make critical friendship a challenge. The traditional dichotomy and hierarchical relationship between friendship and critique makes the notion of critical friends hardly plausible.

A notion of caring friends who provide emotional support is segregated from critics who foster professional growth. The dichotomy of friendship and critique is the norm at the workplace. Lunchrooms and staffrooms are often a refuge from work, a place to put "work" on hold while eating or playing cribbage. Additionally, friendship is usually cast as less professional and less productive than critique. It is often devalued as merely lunchroom gossip. Critique holds a higher status in professional development. For example, it is the department head's critical evaluation or instructional presentation that is cast as being professional, while not necessarily construed as being supportive.

Practicing critical friendship creates dilemmas for the teacher participants and facilitators of such communities. Our study documented many instances of resistance and tensions. It is not clear how critical friends can be nor how friendly critics can be. One teacher praises another for his probing critique of a curriculum presented in a charette; another, reports confidentially that she sees the same event as a violation of community norms for equitable and congenial relations as the critique was "too critical". Other dilemmas are raised when participants: leave problematic assumptions unchallenged; limit

their participation to "warm" or "safe" feedback; or members resist hearing criticism. This work exposes some of the dilemmas and tensions posed by fostering critical friendship.

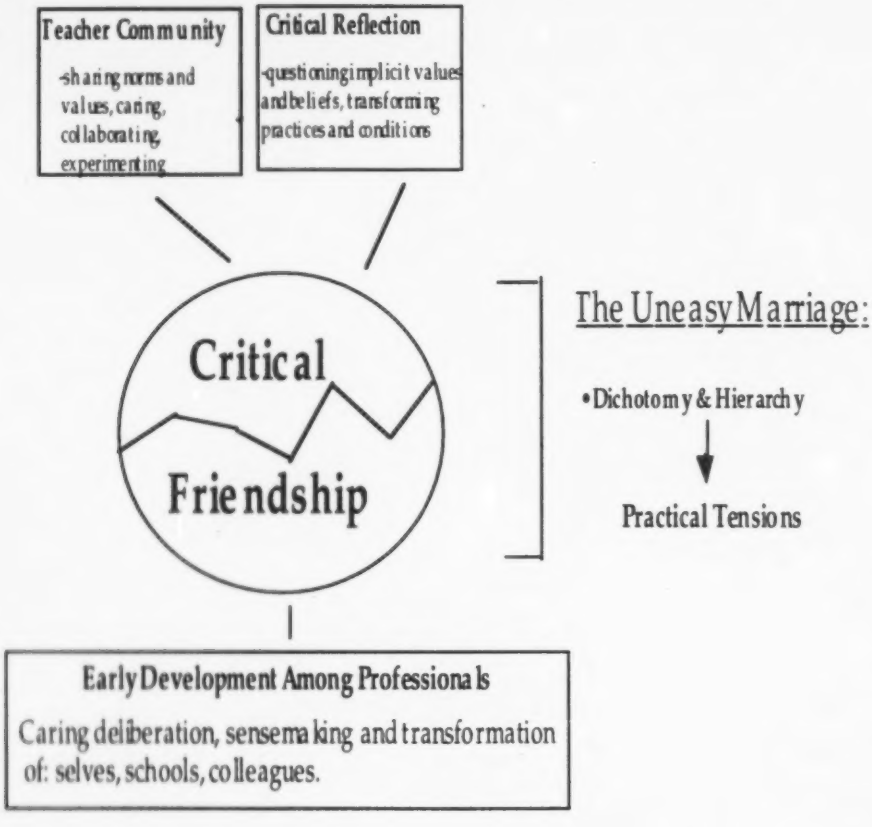
Teacher Community
-sharing norms and values, caring, collaborating, experimenting
Critical Reflection
-questioning implicit values and beliefs, transforming practices and conditions
Critical Friendship
The Uneasy Marriage:
•Dichotomy & Hierarchy
Practical Tensions
Early Development Among Professionals
Caring deliberation, sensemaking and transformation of: selves, schools, colleagues.

Figure (1): The uneasy marriage of critical friendship

As this figure depicts, critical friendship draws from two distinct "parent" theories; teacher community and critical reflection. The teacher community side emphasizes shared norms, caring relations and risktaking actions. The critical reflection side brings a questioning stance in service of uncovering and transforming practice and conditions. In its ideal form, the outcome of critical friendship is the early development among professionals, where novice teachers engage in caring deliberation in order to make sense of and transform themselves, their schools and colleagues. This paper raises questions about the "uneasy marriage" of critique and friendship, exposing the dichotomous and hierarchical relationship which results in practical tensions.

Research Context, Design and Methods

Research Setting

This study draws from a three-year, voluntary collaboration among nine teachers and two university researchers at Stanford University. This collaborative study sits within a larger consortium of researchers' efforts at Stanford, University of California, Berkeley,

and Vanderbilt university funded by the Mellon Foundation to study Brown and Campione's "Fostering a Community of Learners."[2]

This specific network is composed of self-selected members, each of whom graduated from Stanford University's teacher education program (STEP) -- a fifth-year, combined masters and credential program. The program is aligned with the traditions of inquiry-oriented teacher education (Tabachnich & Zeichner, 1991), meaning that students are encouraged to become reflective practitioners. They enter the field having kept reflective teaching journals, having conducted action research, having written case studies of their practice, and having regularly examined dilemmas of teaching, their own and others.

Each member of this specific group of teachers to be studied, enrolled in a elective offered within their pre-service program, titled "Fostering Communities of Teachers as Learners." The course was intended as a design intervention in which a community of researchers could gain some insights about how novice teachers learn about, implement and analyze the "Community of Learners"(COL) philosophy developed by U.C. Berkeley's Brown and Campione. During this two-quarter course, the student-teachers collaboratively designed interdisciplinary curricular units which many of the teachers subsequently implemented at their respective school sites and analyzed in various forums at Stanford. Further, they explored notions of community building in their classrooms, emphasizing student collaboration and interdependent research projects.

Now in its third year together, this unusual group of teachers continues to meet voluntarily in spite of the fact that they work at different schools and school levels (middle school and high school) and even though they teach different subjects (mathematics, science, language arts and social studies). The group meets every three weeks for about two and a half hours at a teacher's house and include the sharing of a meal. Of the nine teachers, six are women and three are men. The teachers range in age from 24 to 35 years old. One is Latino and another Asian; the rest are white.[3] The two university facilitators (the authors of this paper) are doctoral students in teacher education each with six years teaching experience at the middle and high school level. They were also the instructors of the pre-service course, "Fostering Communities of Teachers as Learners." One female and the other male, both are white and have taught in urban settings.

The protocol for the meetings includes two central ritualized participant structures. There is "check-in" when participants, one at a time, report what is going on in their lives: personal and professional. check-in is followed by a "charette."[4] Charettes are formal

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[2] Brown & Campione's curricular philosophy has a vision of classrooms as communities within which, students take responsibility for the collective learning of deep, disciplinary ideas and concepts. Some of the specific instructional features include teachers maximizing opportunities for students to learn through talk. Additionally, the teacher utilizes recurring participant structures to foster students' interdependent work, work that involves, research, sharing and performance. Ultimately, the hope is that the classroom that has a dialogic base, authentic inquiry and assessment as well as ample opportunity for metacognition, provides students with the skills to learn the content and processes necessary for lifelong learning.

[3] Of the original nine participants from years one and two, two teachers have left the group and one new teacher has joined in the third year of collaboration. One of the exiting teachers was not a classroom teacher, but a residential advisor in a boarding school. She had struggled with her relationship to this teacher group as she was not in the classroom. The other departing teacher is discussed within the paper. The new teachers who have joined also graduated from the STEP program. Of the two, one has gone through a similar course at Stanford on "fostering a community of learners." Both are white, one male, one female.

[4] *Charette* refers to a protocol used in architecture schools and firms. The process involves an architect's presentation of a project to a critical cohort. Often the project is one that is soon due to be presented to a

inquiry based protocols centered around the presentation and discussion of teacher-selected artifacts. The artifact embodies curricular ideas and/or participant-identified teaching dilemmas. An artifact can include one-to- two page handout outlining a burning question, a curricular interest or dilemma; most often though, artifacts are mini-cases that the teacher has written or a videotapes of the teacher's practice. The presenter sets the context and provides the group with a frame or focus in which to respond to the artifact. What ensues is a critical discussion that attends to the particular artifact and related ideas, issues and experience. Participants frame questions to uncover underlying beliefs of the presenter, engage in discussions about practice, and inquire into changes in their work. The charette ends after either the presenter, or the facilitator indicates that the time for discussion is over, at which point another member of the group summarizes the discussion. Most of the meetings conclude with teachers writing for about five minutes in journals, and discussing new business. There is a follow up at the next session on issues raised by the charette or changes in practice that have occurred as a result.

Design and Methods

To understand the complex and dynamic nature of a community engaged in critical reflection, we chose a qualitative case study design using ethnographic techniques. The case study approach encompasses an attempt to gather richly contextualized data as a way to make sense of complex phenomena (Yin, 1989). Ethnographic methods of interview, observation and document collection were important in understanding the process of how novice teachers within one community engage in critical friendship over time. While case studies reflect specific, rather than generalizable populations, these methods, used to study this novice teacher group supported our efforts to "build theories" which can illuminate ways of understanding similar circumstances (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 1989).

Unique to this study is the role of the coauthors of this paper as participant observation engaged in facilitating and researching along side of the teachers. Such a stance enabled greater access to an "emic" perspective on community membership.We draw from multiple sources of data. They include participant observation, interviews, document collection, audiotaped recordings and transcripts of teachers' weekly-monthly meetings, videos of teachers' in their classrooms, and conceptual memos. Individual and focus group interviews were conducted throughout the study, and documents including curriculum units, teachers' reflective journals, and case writings. The group's meetings were audiotaped and key sessions transcribed for analysis.

The methods of analysis involve preliminary coding and emergent pattern-coding of the data (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The initial coding was generated from an emergent conceptual model of critical friendship which was continually reexamined in light of the data. For example, preliminary codes included, among others, "interdependent work" and "community spirit". Over time, the data forced us to reexamine these codes. New emergent codes included, "shared norms", "sensemaking" and "critical questioning" which forced us to revise our conceptual framework. This process of analysis was necessarily iterative, entailing the generation, revision and regeneration of codes and frames. Finer analysis of the data produced patterns from which themes surfaced. One such theme that emerged was that the teachers frame and negotiate the type and degree of critical friendship they want their peers to bring to bear upon their work. We gradually shifted our focus to the uneasy negotiation of critical friendship that is at play within charettes. Charettes served as important cases of the merger of critique and friendship. We employed content analysis at this point to help us make sense of the "critical" and "friendly" language and interactions found in teachers' conversations.

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client. Therefore, the critical feedback from peers forms a response for an architect's final revision of a product.

A Case of Critical Friendship: Check-In and Charettes in a Novice Teacher Community

In this section we begin with a narrative to illustrate what happens when this group of teachers meet. The three events depicted in the narrative are drawn from three different meetings but are told together to give a sense of the flow of a single meeting with both "check-ins" and "Charettes". The narratives draw from audiotaped transcripts and fieldnotes. We chose these examples because they were rich with both the promise and tensions of critical friendship. We conclude this section with a discussion of the events that uses a notion of critical friendship to understand the meeting. Further, we will use these narratives to disclose some of the tensions experienced from merging critique with friendship.

Sherry's[5] Check-In

It's Thursday. We meet again at Misa' s house, a little bungalow nestled in a working class neighborhood. Hugs and how-are-yous abound. Somebody wonders, or is it a complaint, that there's a dearth of sweets in the food spread across the coffee table. "Who wants to check in?" Sherry, is in her early twenties, younger than probably everyone in the group, whose eldest member is thirty-five. Sherry is the sole private school teacher in a group of public school teachers. From her end of the couch, she says,

> I'll go. I've had a really rough week. I'm okay, but, well, one of the things that happened was that I found out that my department head secretly called some of my students on the phone to find out what I've been teaching. I think some of this started because I have this one girl who's taking two English classes and because I'm not teaching the same as her other teacher, she went to the department head. She's so rude and is always telling me how bad I am as a teacher. I just can't even deal with this now. I've got seventy-five finals to grade and I haven't even started to plan my next unit.

Betty called out, "wait, can I say something here? We're talking about something that is really unprofessional. I'm curious about how you responded." The other teachers begin to ask: "What are you going to do Sherry?" "Have you thought about how you are going to talk to your department head?" Sherry practices what she will say to her department chair. She plans to tell him to see her first when he concerned about her teaching and to offer some support. She concludes with her voice trailing off, "thanks you guys. I'm okay."

Kay and Mario's Charette

After the others check-in, Tom, a facilitator says, "Kay and Mario are going to update us on the Enlightenment unit that they've been collaborating on." At this point, Kay looks at Mario while she reminds the group, "we both teach 7th grade core history and language arts classes, me at San Peralta and Mario at Lincoln Middle school." Mario adds,

> we both thought that being in the group would help us design a "Community of Learners" curriculum unit that we could implement. So the stuff you're going to see tonight reflects about two or three after-school

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[5] All teacher participants were given pseudonyms. All quotations from our study included in this paper are taken transcripts of interviews and observations over the course of the three years of research.

> meetings, a ton of phone calls, and a professional day we took last week to get this together.

Outside of this meeting, Mario confided in one of the facilitators that this planning with Kay actually got Mario in trouble with the team of teachers with whom he is required to plan at school. His school site colleagues went to the principal, explaining that he was not a "team player." Mario's peers and principal are upset that he has taught a two-week unit in place of the required seventh grade curriculum.

Turning to their charette, Kay explains, "We'll sort of go through the things we're doing and see if we[sic] still have questions..." Kay and Mario distribute and read aloud a rationale for their Enlightenment unit before "walking" the group through a two-week calendar. Their unit's central question asks students to consider whether or not people are capable of governing themselves. The teachers planned what they called a "community of Learners" curriculum emphasizing a collaborative classroom in which groups of students research and discuss their studies and build on each others' knowledge. In this unit, their students will work in expert groups to research particular philosophers from the Enlightenment era. In the proposed unit's final assessment, students will work independently to create a collage showing how the Enlightenment's great thinkers would answer the central question; and then the students will individually submit articles for a class encyclopedia.

Kay confidently says, "so that's our unit." Members of the group quickly applaud the generativity of the concept . After a round of compliments, Donald quietly asks,

> Can I, Can I make some comments? Its more about the structure of the way you set it up. You said something earlier, Mario, that kind of interested me: that you're not really sure what 'Communities of Learners' is. O.K., um, it seems to me that it's very empowering for students to go in and learn something different than other students, and then come back and to share it. And then to have to use that knowledge to create something new. And it seems to me that in your unit, they're kind of going along and learning the same things at the same time, so by the end the only new thing is the creativity in the collage.

Donald, with the contribution of other group members, unlocks a problem. He asks the presenters to justify the collage and the encyclopedia in light of Brown and Campione's principles, which encourage interdependence and distributed expertise. Betty continues,

> These assessments don't push the students to go anywhere beyond an isolated regurgitation of what they've already done. My question is how can you make these activities so that your students could collectively apply what they've learned to something new?

Mario appears intrigued and says, "well I wonder if anyone has any ideas for what might work better." The group engages in an animated brainstorm which results in an alternative assessment, in which small groups of students will write scripts that reflect the various philosophical points of view as applied to a current school issue. The students will perform these skits for their classmates. Mario and Kay thank the group for the work they did in helping them reconceptualize the unit and singled out Donald who started the conversation. As if to punctuate that the time for feedback has ended, Kay stands up to take some chips from the table and says, "thanks again" just as somebody mumbles, "one last thing."

Donald's Charette

Donald is a teacher who has been studying and experimenting with Brown and Campione's principles of "communities of learners" in his classroom as well. He has worked extensively constructing classroom norms to support his belief that "students learn math by talking math." Donald frames his charette that includes sharing a portion of a videotape and typed transcript of a lesson in his mathematics classroom, by saying,

> Before I begin, I just want to say, I'm showing you a [videoclip] in which I step out of my comfort zone. I could have shown you this other one here that I brought -- which makes my math teaching look better. But the one I'm showing you-- well, I wouldn't be comfortable showing it to someone I wouldn't trust...especially someone who would be critical of my mathematics teaching.

He tells the group how to watch the video: "So that when you watch, I want to say that you're seeing a case of teacher restraint, a case of teacher restraint in service of student-driven learning. " Then for fifteen minutes Donald describes the mathematical content that the teachers will see in the tape. In the tape, Donald and some students discuss one student's answer to a math question about percentages. Though the answer is incorrect, Donald does not steer them away from it. Donald's participation in this classroom conversation involves eliciting his students' understandings of the answer, with a particular focus on having students respond to each others' ideas and reasoning.

When the videoclip has ended, Donald repeats that he is interested in hearing about "this as a case of teacher restraint in support of student-driven understanding or anything else you see." Misa sits forward and asks Donald about the kind of feedback he wants:

> Donald, I don't know how to say this...other than. Well, you have not always liked it in the past when we comment on "anything we see." So do you want us to tell you what we see or talk about what you said, the thing about teacher restraint?

Donald shrugs and asks, "do you want me to take you through the math some more, or I could show you the tape."

A number of teachers quickly applaud Donald's classroom norms. Within the tape, people point out the amount of "wait time" or pauses that Donald takes as a teacher to encourage student participation. They comment how students talk and listen to their peers. Donald intervenes, "but don't you see? Eight whole minutes go by without the students getting the right answer."

Philip, an English teacher in an urban, working class neighborhood, shakes his head in disbelief and smiles.

> Maybe I'm missing something, but I'm utterly baffled about the crisis! I would be thrilled if my students could sustain that level of talk for eight minutes, say wrestling about the meaning of the river in Bless Me Ultima ...Maybe this is a matter of your discipline. Maybe eight minutes of students having a good conversation is less problemsome in English where we often prize multiple interpretations versus math where we traditionally work to the right answer.

Donald, reconfirming his own commitment to the way he is teaching, says,

> That's just it. I believe that to learn math, kids need to talk math, even if their talk is seemingly wrong. But, that puts me in opposition to my school

> district where -- the local community continually pressures my math department to be more traditionally outcome-oriented instead of constructivist. That's why I feel vulnerable about this tape. A critic of my teaching will watch me let kids pursue their own agendas in my class for eight whole minutes without even getting the right answer.

Misa speaks up next, turning the conversation to students' equitable access to participate in Donald's classroom.

> Given that you think that kids need to talk math to learn math, I'm concerned about the kids who aren't talking in this tape. Don't you think there needs to be some equity in terms of access to the learning in your classroom, Donald?

Misa, has spotted a number of students who have their heads on their desks in the videotape. Donald attributes the number of non-talkers to the complexity of the topic that makes it difficult to sustain any conversation like this with more than "eight to ten students" out of the twenty-five. Donald reports that one of the promising things is the continuing shift of "key players" in any given discussion. He remarks that around 60-75% of the students have played key player roles over time.

Tom, who up to this point has quietly been taking notes, speaks.

> I'm starting to think about the way you framed this video as a case of teacher restraint. I think it's important to make a distinction. You clearly restrain yourself in terms of content; after all, you allow your students to pursue a topic of their choosing and to construct a wrong answer; but you hardly restrain yourself in the process.

Tom points to the transcript that accompanies the video andshows that except for one set of five turns, the predominant pattern of talk includes one teacher turn for every student turn. Philip adds, " Donald do you see your norms of discussion as tools to ultimately prepare your students to take more responsibility while you gradually remove yourself from the loop?" Donald comments, "I have never tried to remove myself from the conversation, and I'm not at a point where I'm ready to do so. I have fun participating and I think my student-centered learning is teacher-reliant." In a final set of responses in this charette, Mario gently challenges Donald to accept responsibility for the contradiction of his beliefs and actions.

> Donald, you have the answer and I'm confused about it. You believe that they talk math to learn math and at the same time, you have to acknowledge the control you really have in this classroom. You talk more than anyone, you decide who gets to talk, which topics you want to pursue, and whose ideas get on the chalkboard.

Dave repeats his commitment to his active role as teacher. Time allotted to this charette has elapsed.

Making sense of the critical friendship in a day in the life of a novice teacher community

One way to make sense of this day in the life of a novice teacher community is to understand the positive impact of critical friendship. A novice teacher group such as this one which practices critical friendship participates in collective work and thus may come to share common norms about teaching. This novice teacher group has collaborated in developing and implementing interdisciplinary curricular units and exploring beliefs and practices around "communities of learners" principles. They having engaged in reciprocal

classroom observations in person and through video-tapes. They have worked at play and played at work. These shared experiences have provided and reinforced a set of shared norms centered around the exploration of community.

In both Charettes described above the group returns to common commitments of community building in the classroom. In Mario and Kay's, it is through the reminder that a final curriculum assessment should embody the interdependent community which these teachers hope to foster. In Donald's, the group pushes Donald to make explicit his vision of a classroom where students talk and teach each other, and to confront inconsistencies in practice (teacher dominance) which may undermine the kind of community in which he believes. Such common norms may help sustain these teachers commitments even when they are at odds with their schools, as is the case with Donald's conservative school community.

Interestingly, the common norms about fostering community in their classrooms is reinforced by their own adult experience of community with the other novice teachers. That is to say that the adults, through their shared work, are experiencing a sort of learning community quite analogous to the types that their beliefs encourage them to foster.

Another key ingredient depicted about critical friendship from this teacher group is the caring deliberation that occurs (Noddings 1992; Bullough & Gitlin, 1991). One teacher, Marny, reflected on the many values she places on this collaboration which provides support and diminishes isolation.

> We realized in developing our unit and working together in the classroom how important teacher support is. And I always knew that I was missing something in my student teacher experience. But it wasn't until after that that I realized it was someone to talk to, and work with. And I'm also pretty isolated where I am this year...So I again came into it with sort of a curriculum angle, and have since just loved coming to the meetings. I think, "oh, I'm gonna feel so much better in three hours." So it's been largely other teacher support I think.

This experience offers beginning teachers a site of emotional support, a place where they can expose and explore vulnerabilities. This may be particularly important for novice teachers who regularly have feelings of isolation, as well as confusion as they transition from teacher education programs which foster innovation and progressive teaching to school sites that may not invite nor be able to support that preparation. In Sherry's check-in, she names her vulnerability in terms of how she 'feels' about her job - badly - and gives the group permission to help her interpret her department head's actions and to rehearse her response. In Donald's charette, he confides his vulnerability and takes the risk of showing classroom footage for which he feels anguish. He selects the "bad" tape instead of the "good" one to share. The high level of support engenders trust which enables teachers to confide and explore various vulnerabilities. Revisiting these situations may prompt discussions of personal beliefs and actions while exposing the gulfs that lie between the two.

This context of caring deliberation not only supports teachers in commiserating about a host of concerns, and in publicly taking risks about their teaching, but as importantly, it sets the stage for teachers' sensemaking. The teachers make sense of educationally related issues within three important dimensions. They make sense about themselves, their schools and the interaction between the two. In the case of Sherry, the group tries to make sense of a disquieting interaction with her principal. In the case of Mario and Kay, members of the group collectively make sense of a problematic assessment and in doing so, are able to surface the traditional assessment that their peers have inadvertently recreated to culminate a unit intended to foster an academic community. In Donald's charette, group members begin to understand Donald's conceptions of

constructivist learning in a math class and how those beliefs and practices are in opposition to more traditional beliefs of math teaching held within his school community.

The caring deliberation, along with the sensemaking provide the possibility for critical reflection. A developing norm within this group encourages individuals to collectively question, probe and uncover hidden assumptions which in turn can effect a change in beliefs and practice. This means that the group shares work in progress and offers critique in the form of hard questions as opposed to more traditional forms of group interactions centered on "show and tell" and "fix it" responses. The group may move away from pat answers to deeper questioning. Mario described, "when I come to these meetings ... we can challenge each other in ways that might not be comfortable."

With Mario and Kay's charette, Donald helps the presenters see that their curricular design has failed the ideals of Brown and Campione through the elimination of collective and dialogic work. In Donald's charette, group members surface contradictions between his philosophy and his practice. They, along with others in the group ask him to reexamine the notion of "teacher restraint" with which he has framed his teaching. They confront him with his own more dominant role.

The skills of individual and collaborative critique may become internalized as members pose their own questions in sharing their work and begin to see their work in a critical light. Moreover, the group poses issues as dilemmas to be revisited, continually experimented with and as fruitful intellectual challenges. One member, Brad, explains,

> We'll throw out an issue. people will make comments about it, but not like, 'you should do this, this, and this.' But, 'I've done this, think about this,'" and I think there's a general level of respect. If someone comes with a question, we understand they've already put some thought into it. They may already have some ideas of their own, we're just trying to illuminate it, maybe help them look at it in a different way, as opposed to just, "here is my answer for you."

Ultimately, reflection may effect transformation. In the case of Sherry, the rehearsal of the dialogue with her department head might have altered the way that Sherry actually handled the situation. In the case of Mario and Kay, the discussion of assessment effected a change in the way that they conceptualized "communities of learner" practices and the way they culminated their Enlightenment unit. The teachers revised their assessment in this one instance. In the case of Donald, the group pushed Donald to name his beliefs about learning -- "students learn math by talking" -- and to critically reflect about the ten to fifteen kids who are not talking in a given conversation. They also asked him to acknowledge and reflect on his complicity in this, given his domination of the conversation. What is the legacy and generativity of these moments of critical friendship? Are they isolated? Are they internalized by a presenter, members of the group? Do they effect changes in instruction? collegial relations? These are more difficult questions to answer.

The work of this novice teacher group not only informs others about the structures in place that can foster critical friendships, but offers some encouraging outcomes. Members of the group: regularly brought a critical sensibility and questioning to the work and ideas of their peers within meetings; voluntarily collaborated on curriculum design and concurrent experimentation and reflection outside of the group's routine; regularly participated in celebratory rituals; often acted as a network providing interdependent resources.

Given these positive findings, how are we to make sense of some of the difficulties posed by merging critique and friendship? How can we come to understand some of the tensions that lie in this uneasy marriage?

An Uneasy Marriage Between Critique and Friendship

Institutional barriers which separate and hierarchicalize the relationship between critique and friendship surfaced in the tensions experienced by participants enacting critical friendship in this novice teacher group. In one blatant example, the university research advisors, who had initially sponsored the group during its preservice year hesitated in commiting to continuing support for a second because they were concerned that the group convened "only to commiserate about first-year teacher woes" rather than continue the professional work sponsored in their teacher education program. Also, as facilitators bent on providing a merger of emotional and professional support -- we found that we inadvertently helped to sustain the institutional dichotomy. In our efforts to develop a set of structural norms for the group's meetings, we created two distinct structures, an affective "checking-in" and a professional critique "charette." This structuring implicitly called on participants to check-in emotionally and then share professionally. In the meetings, considerably more time has been spent on charettes than on check in and in fact, when pressed for time, the group has abandoned check-in. These examples served to reinforce the hierarchy and separation of critique from friendship.

It would be one thing to say that sustaining the institutional dichotomy was the work of university outsiders. Teacher members of the group were also responsible, often wanting the group to be an arena to discuss emotional or professional concerns, but not both. Sherry described that the group "helps me to put things in perspective when things are crazy at school," and Sarah said, "I know for me I think part of it was an emotional connection. It was support ...and we're all facing some of the same issues".

For others, the opposite was true. Kay rejected an interest of an emotional support group, preferring a more professional stance. In this way she segregated and hierarchicalized the relationship between emotions and professional matters.

> I did not want to come here and sort of have this teacher problem-solving, I mean getting through the emotional things of teachers...I'm really more interested in this idea of professionalism or feeling like you're sort of exploring the discipline and trying to learn more about techniques.

On this same note, Brad expressed dissatisfaction with the group on the grounds that he is "outcome oriented" and that he "didn't find as many connections to what [he] was doing in the class to what we were discussing in the group." He left the group after its second year.

The teacher statements above certainly support a dichotomous notion as they maintain separate domains for emotional and professional support. It could be argued that members of the group, like their university counterparts, ascribed more value to professional work than emotional support. Sherry, who valued the group for helping her to sort out crazy days, seemed embarrassed that she wasn't doing more professional work with the group. "I felt like I should be working more with an COL curriculum in my classroom." Similarly, Sarah reported,

> I feel like I've just come in on the verge of tears and really struggled. It's been a lot of emotional support for me...but I've done very little in the way of creating curriculum and actually [doing more than] jigsaws and some little things that are part of "Communities of Learners" approaches.

Sarah chides herself for not doing more of the group's professional work, spending more time using the group for emotional support.

Exposing the Seams - critical friendship tensions seen in Charettes

By looking more closely at the practice of critical friendship through the group's charette format, we may uncover tensions or "seams" which expose the uneasy marriage of

critique and friendship. These "seams" are the moments of disjuncture or awkwardness within the charettes. By pointing out these seams - disruptions, absences or breaks in the "natural order of things" or routines - we may be able to reveal more clearly the contradictions experienced when critique challenges friendship and vice versa. We look at three occasions which represent: the framing occasions of the charette when the presenter indicates to the group the type of responses she or he would like; the negotiating occasions when members of the group act and react to critical and supportive comments; and absent occasions that are missing from the conversation altogether. Looking at the language of charettes through these three occasions highlights many tensions.

Framing Occasions:

As members present a charette, they first introduce the work (giving a context of their school and classroom) and the kind of feedback they would like from the group through "framing" questions or remarks. While these framing occasions demonstrate how comfortable teachers are in talking about instructional context, these moments expose discomfort in articulating how critical or friendly the presenter would like the feedback to be. A tacit pact is made rather than articulated, leaving many participants confused about a response stance.

These framing moments expose the seams of critical friendship by the awkwardness or disruptions of "comfortable" dialogue and routines. In Donald's charette, he makes explicit his vulnerability and fear of criticism. He refers to stepping out of his "comfort zone" and how he wouldn't necessarily show this work to someone who would be critical of his mathematics teaching. These signals frame the limits of criticism. Further, in explaining his video as "an example of teacher restraint," Donald frames the work as a presentation of completed work, rather than a sharing which allows criticism and the potential for change. Donald also ignores Misa's remarks that he does not always appreciate "comments on anything we see." Here Misa tries to push Donald to be explicit about his framing. How "up for discussion" is this piece of work? This is an especially important question since Misa has identified that Donald has been uncomfortable letting others control the direction of conversation on his charette. He ignores the question, leaving members of the group unsure about their responses.

Similarly, in Kay and Mario's charette some inadvertent language demonstrates that the locus of control will remain with the presenters thus limiting critique. Kay explained, "We'll sort of go through the things we're doing and see if we[sic] still have questions..." That "we" refers to Kay and Mario, rather than the collective engaged in inquiry. This frame stipulates that presenters will remain in control of the questioning and the unit will probably remain intact.

In other charettes, the seams are equally visible. Other participants expose difficulties in balancing critique and friendship. One teacher was reluctant to share her work and handed over "framing" responsibility, asking one of the university facilitators to introduce the Charette and video. In this way, the teacher did not "own" the work, and thus may also have separated herself from any criticism. Alternatively, Mario in a later charette of his own, unsatisfied with the "warm" or friendly feedback, explicitly tells the group, "I'm feeling very comfortable and happy with your criticisms, so please, gimme some things that are confusing, treat this as a rough draft and be pretty harsh". He needs to make explicit that criticism is acceptable and give permission for members to be "harsh".

Negotiating Occasions

As the group responds to a charette they continually negotiate with the presenter and others about how critical and how friendly they will be. Questions are raised about how critical can friends be and how friendly can critics be. When responses to charette's remain on the safe side, providing primarily supportive or reassuring comments which reinforce the group's commitment to their common vision of teaching, one has to wonder if maintenance of friendship is at play. In Donald's charette, teachers respond to framing

comments about Donald's vulnerability with appreciative and reassuring comments about his practice. Philip explained, he would be "thrilled if [his] students could sustain that level of talk." Others praised him for his classroom norms. These comments may serve to reconfirm the group's commitment to common values of progressive pedagogy and student-centered classrooms, as well as reassure a friend. Similarly, respondants to Mario and Kay first gave "warm" feedback about the generative nature of their curriculum before giving harder feedback about the culminating assessment.

Just as important as the responding teachers' level of critique, is the power of the presenter to accept, reject, invite or defer criticism. What happens when your friend does not want to hear critique? When Donald was challenged to address the inconsistencies raised between his own vision of "teacher restraint" and the actual amount of student "air time" in classroom conversations (as well as equitable access by all students), he is not open to considering changes. He repeats his dedication to student-centered practice although defining it as "teacher reliant" and has not considered changing his role. Nor does he entertain notions of having more than eight to ten students engage in a classroom conversation. In some charettes, the presenters "shut down" criticism by directing the charette discussion away from questions back to more presentation. Similarly, Kay ends critique by thanking the group and standing up before all feedback is completed.

The opposite situation is seen in when Mario responds early on in his charette to critical feedback. When issues about inconsistencies in commitment to "community of learners" principles in the culminating activity, Mario responds, "I wonder if anyone has any ideas for what might work better". This opens up a group conversation and some further criticisms.

In many other charettes, the kind of feedback from participants remains in the realm of clarifying questions rather than critique. Questions are asked about teaching context, materials used, and next steps (e.g.. "so how many students do you have?", "What had you done just before that?"). When discussion about a teachers' work remain more centered on clarifying questions than on the aims and dilemmas that lie below content and context, we must ask how critical are such responses? In other cases, critique that does surface may be limited, leaving problematic assumptions unchallenged.

There are many occasions where critique is prefaced with language which exposes the seams of discomfort, by role playing critique rather than owning it. In this way the speaker distances herself from the role of critic by acting as an ally. Examples include statements like, "playing devil's advocate here" or "I don't believe this but how would you respond to this?" In Mario and Kay's charette, Donald prefaces his critique with hedging language, "can I, can I make some comments."

When there is "hard" feedback, it is oftentimes initiated by a university facilitator. In Donald's charette it was Tom, a facilitator who criticized Donald's use of the term "teacher restraint" when the teacher was the most dominant in the classroom. Both facilitators often start critical questioning off and most often contribute outside perspectives. Is this effective modeling of critical friendship which will be picked up by participants or has the group learned to rely on facilitators as critic so that friendship among peers may remain in tact?

Absent Occasions

There are also occasions when critical friendship is altogether absent in interactions. Occasions where private criticisms are never made public and other times when issues are not voiced at all. While modeling of critical friendship is important, we have found that even with a set of structures and norms to support the merger of emotional and professional support, many critical moments lie dormant. Many such moments remain unexplored in relation to internal group norms that remain tacit or surface only privately. A participant confides in a facilitator that she resents another member for talking incessantly about his practice without eliciting others' viewpoints. Misa explained she would not publicly raise

an issue that she thought another member had mishandled a situation in his school, "because he would take it too personally."

Other issues never make it on the agenda (publicly or privately) which may threaten deep group beliefs. No one has questioned Sherry about teaching in a private religious school while all participants share public school certification and discuss a common commitment to diverse youth. When a group member discloses that she is thinking about leaving teaching, there was a quiet moment. No one addressed the issue, asked questions or made any remarks about it . When two teachers left the group after its second year, there was no discussion of their departure.

Finally, because of the "outsider" status of this group, some critical friendship may go "unheard" or unenacted at the school site. Because this is a network of teachers from nine different schools, the enacted change part of critical friendship is limited. One may ask whether these are the right friends, seeing that impact on changing classroom and school practice would need the support of on-site colleagues. In at least two instances, members' participation in this group challenged their on-site community, alienating them from school colleagues. Mario confided that his school site colleagues resented his collaboration with Kay. They took this issue to the principal. Donald described his own oppositional stance with his conservative school community and worried about his prospects for tenure.

By exploring the framing, negotiating, and absent occasions of critical friendship in charettes, we may better understand the tensions which such a merger fosters. The experiences of this novice teacher learning community offer evidence of the practical tensions of critical friendship which challenges the optimism of many scholars. These experiences also provide important lessons about some successes in navigating this uneasy marriage. We must, though, remember the unique nature of this group and caution others about the limitations of this research.

Limitations

This group of novice teachers engaged in critical friendship is obviously not typical of most teacher collaboratives. For one, all participants graduated from the same teacher education program, are young, and primarily white middle class. The uniqueness of this setting makes us cautious of generalizations. Nevertheless, the issues of tensions raised by critical friendship may translate to other settings engaged in similar efforts.

Another limitation is the unusual roles played by both facilitators. We facilitated this group for three years, acted as researchers, and co-collaborators with the teachers. Sometimes these multiple roles became confusing. Balancing insider and outsider perspectives is always a challenge. We recognize the importance of our insider role, while understanding its limitations.

Lessons of Critical Friendship within a novice teacher learning Community

Because teacher collaboration and critical friendship are so widely encouraged and praised as a source for professional development and as a means for school change, educators need a stronger analytic and practical understanding about critical friendship. In this paper we sought to broaden the conceptual understanding of critical friendship and the dilemmas posed by it. This concluding section outlines some of the lessons we have learned in three years with this group of teachers.

Groups must be carefully structured to help participants recognize and confront the institutionalized myths that perpetuate the dichotomy of critique and friendship. Even with the promise that critical friendship offers members in terms of sensemaking and transformation, we can not overemphasize the tensions that are posed by the institutional

myths that severs critique from friendship, and devalues support in favor of "professional" development. As facilitators, we spent considerable time surfacing the dichotomy and pushing people within the group and outside of the group to see the potential in the merger of the two.

In service of alleviating some of the tensions experienced by critical friends, there needs to be ritualized participant structures in place. A formal protocol like the charette encourages individuals to share teaching beliefs and practice in a social setting where hard questioning can take place in a climate of trust.

Even with this regular ritual, facilitation of teacher learning communities is incumbent on careful modeling of critical friendship. This modeling involves personal risk-taking, probing criticism, and a sincere care for the personal and collective growth of the group. This is no easy task. There have been many times where we have privately wondered and publicly asked if our critical feedback and questioning went beyond what was wanted. As we reflect on our role in the group, we wonder like Philip (in the case of Donald's charette), if we should consciously be withdrawing ourselves from the loop, taking less and less air time; or conversely, we wonder if our ongoing critical role is a genuine and necessary quality of our participation.

Learning the language and gaining an ability to critically challenge peers comes with time and practice. Understanding the developmental process of critical friendship means learning a new language and unlearning many teacher norms. This group's work began with the co-construction of a curriculum unit. Early conversations were often centered on the suitability of this poem or that magazine article. Gradually the teachers have moved from a preponderance of safe clarifying questions, to some probing questions of beliefs and actions.

One must weigh the costs and benefits of fostering critical friendship in a teacher learning community situated outside of a school (a network). We are fully aware that networks like these are like double-edged swords. On the one hand, a collective of novice teachers from multiple sites offer diverse perspectives (which may enable greater critique of schools and schooling than insider groups) and a climate of support for teachers new to the field. They meet at a private residence, an alternative space that probably affords a certain freedom to explore various important dimensions of teaching, learning and school that might not be as accessible at other sites of professional development.

On the other hand, even though these friendly critics continue to deliberate after three years, we have many questions about the viability of this group and others similarly situated. Such collaborations which sit outside of a school (or even university - as its university affiliation is somewhat tenuous at this point), may be unstable over time. Further, this network's "outsider" status may limit its impact on school change. If the goal of critical friendship is ultimately to change practice and schools, one needs to ask, which friends are more important? A network may at times even draw attention away from a teachers' commitment at her home school, or compete with school norms. Mario's network friends support his curricular experimentation at the same time that his school-site peers sanction him for straying from their teams' work. Donald's network friends support his constructivist stance even though it puts him in opposition to some of his school site peers and may put him at risk in his quest for tenure.

Past work on critical friendship has left many teachers ill-equipped to face the tensions involved in a merger of two sometimes incompatible goals . If fostering critically reflective teacher communities is worthwhile in terms of the early development among professionals, then exploring more of the complexities and the needed supports for such endeavors is crucial. The experiences of this novice teacher learning community fill us with hope as well as further questions in our efforts to navigate the uneasy marriage between friendship and critique.

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